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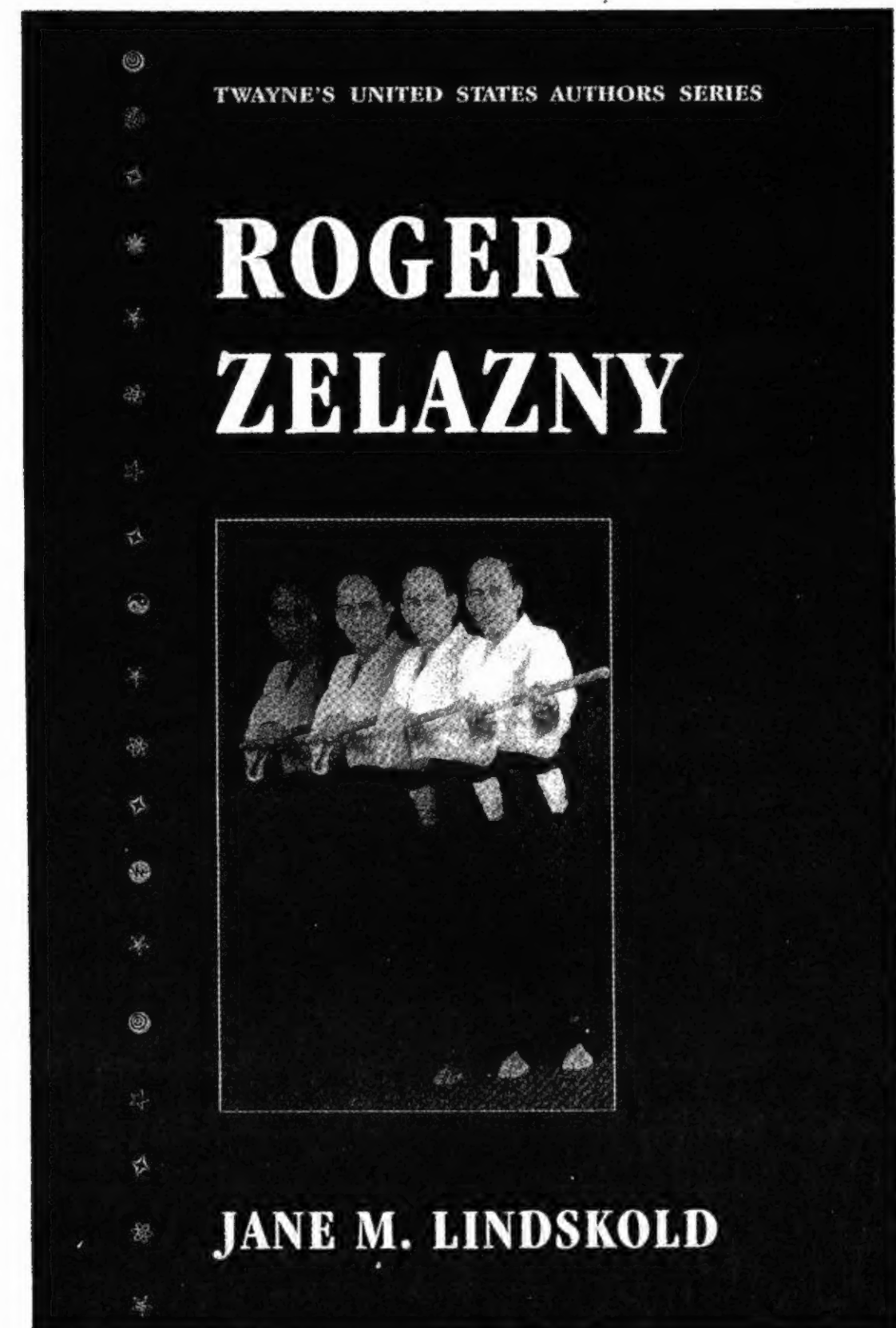


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Two Critical Reviews

ROGER ZELAZNY, Jane M. Lindskold. Twayne's United States Authors Series. 166 pp+, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4", boards. Twayne Publishers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Company, 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. To order by phone call 1-800-257-5755. Or special order from your book-seller: ask for *Roger Zelazny* by Jane Lindskold (ISBN: 0-8057-3953-X).



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Coming up with sufficient praise for Algis Budrys is simply beyond me. Now the publisher and editor of Tomorrow Speculative Fiction, he was, for decades, the book reviewer for Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine. Aside from my own opinion (I think Budrys is the best critical voice in all of science fiction), it's worth noting that Roger Zelazny was quite pleased to hear that he'd be appearing in these pages.

The thrust of this book is to show the seminal influences on Zelazny's speculative fiction and poetry, and to re-examine his thematic material. That it does very well; Lindsfold is an old, old friend of Zelazny's, with many letters exchanged between them over the years, and occasional meetings, even before she took up this project. And she has been assistant professor of English at Lynchburg College in Virginia, trained in the necessary disciplines. So Frank Day, of Clemson University, the series editor, is to be commended for having chosen her to do this book.

There is no "other shoe...", no buts, no "with that said, the reviewer must point out..." It is what it sets out to be, and I can hardly imagine anyone who could have done better, or been more comprehensive in what she set out to do.

My favorite memory of Roger Zelazny is of a lecture

he gave at the French National Convention in Paris a few years ago. It was a fascinating lecture, with diagrams, and Roger bounding back and forth in the hall, pointing here and there. It was a fascinating sight, particular since he was shoeless and bounding back and forth on the tops of the desks. Here, I thought, is a various man.

I had no idea how various. The front half of Lindsfold is devoted to what he did to prepare himself as a writer, and what he does to expand himself. I cannot imagine where he finds the time; certainly he does and did more than almost all writers. I have never heard of a writer preparing himself so thoroughly and systematically.

He was not sure whether he would be a poet or a writer of prose. For a long time this was uncertain. What was sure was that he would be a writer of some sort, with any other occupation simply an

anchor to windward. Gradually, he realized that what he wanted to do was write SF; poetry, though he was good at it, wouldn't ever support him.

Born in 1937, he published his first poem in 1954, and in 1957 won the first of two Finley Foster Poetry Prizes; he won it again in 1959, and the Holden Essay Award to boot. In 1962, he published two SF pieces, one in *Amazing* and one in *Fantastic*. That is also the year, with an M.A. in English from Columbia University, that he began processing claims for the Social Security Administration in Cleveland.

In 1963, he published "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," and his career as a speculative fiction writer was established overnight. But it was not until 1969, with three Hugos and a Nebula by then, that he quit the Social Security Administration. His life did not change to any marked degree; he still read a great deal in specific categories, as laid down by Jacques Barzun and others, and he read for pleasure (which is not to say that his reading in history and biography were not pleasurable), and he practiced martial arts, and he continued his interest in the Elizabethan poets, and on,

and on. The bottom line on Roger Zelazny is that he is a high-energy human being; far higher than most, sustained far longer than most. It is as if he had a source of 36-hour days.

Now, what I have quoted to you above is all from Lindsfold's book, and does not begin to scratch the surface of what this man does every day in addition to writing—though it is clear that very little he does does not in fact fuel and inform his writing. The man is ferocious, in the best sense of that word; he has built a life that is totally focussed on his writing. We have a few other examples of that in the field, but I do not think we have an example that is a nicer guy. And that last fact Lindsfold does not make a point of; perhaps, being an academic rather than a rough-and-tumble freelance, she does not realize how rare it is for a person to be so completely concentrated and yet still have the time for the human touch that comes easily mostly in the movies.

I will leave it to others to discuss the book *qua* book. Lindsfold does a very good job of tracing influences, and she does a creditable job of refuting such common superficial assertions as Zelazny's

only having one hero, and Zelazny being clumsy with females. I think she refutes those pretty well, and in process proves—or re-proves—that Zelazny is a very, very good writer of uncommon range and accomplishment.

What she does not touch on, because she is too young, is the difference between Zelazny and the writers who were born just a few years ahead of him. Equally intelligent, some of them, and equally dedicated to becoming speculative fiction writers, hardly any of them had much in the way of a formal education. Typically, they were college dropouts. Also, they were headed into writing that was despised in many quarters. (It was not until, coincidentally, Zelazny's time that this began to change.)

Some of them did a little better—Sheckly, for instance, or Michael Shaara, who actually wound up on a college faculty after he stopped writing science fiction, or Philip K. Dick—but others, such as I, simply did not form the habit of systematically continuing to grow and develop in any formal way. We were not stupid, and we continued to grow after the fashion of wildflowers, but it was just plain unheard of to cultivate ourselves in the

manner exemplified by Zelazny.

Just as were a different breed from the engineers of the 1940s who took up SF as a hobby, so Zelazny represents a different breed from us—a breed which is still going. Meticulously hewing to a life plan which he laid down long ago, introducing evolutions now and then, certainly growing, as Lindsfold beautifully illustrates, his attack on the writing of SF is both poetical and, in the best sense, businesslike. I remember his bouncing fluidly over the tabletops, to the astonishment of the assembled Frenchmen; truly graceful, I gradually realized. And I remember his pointing to specific places on the diagrams, unerringly, as he made his points, unerringly.

He is quite a guy, and in Lindsfold he has quite a discussant.

—*Algis Budrys*

What better reviewer could we have, of a biography of Roger Zelazny, than the author of the first biography of Roger Zelazny, Carl Yoke. Readers will kindly note that we had to coax this piece out of Dr. Yoke, since he was wary of offending either of his good friends, his old friend Roger, and his young friend Jane...

Jane Lindsfold's book is conceived from a love and admiration of Zelazny's writing. That is both its virtue and its vice.

Certainly the book provides a valuable insight into Zelazny, the writer, charting influences and processes that end up as part of his stories. By his own admission, Zelazny never wanted to do anything other than write. Probably, no one has better prepared himself for the job.

Lindsfold presents a convincing argument for the impact of certain literary and educational influences on his work. She accurately traces the influences of English teachers Harold Blackburn and Ruby Olsen, and Journalism teacher Myron Gorden on the young Zelazny. Blackburn told him to read Joyce's *Ulysses*, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* because collectively they covered all human experience and all the literary devices and all the approaches one can take to

literature. These would provide touchstones for anything else that Zelazny read. Similarly, Lindsfold traces the influence of the sciences, in particular psychology, and of the visual, musical, and martial arts. Because this forms much of her work, Lindsfold's book is an extremely valuable font for all who seek to understand Zelazny's stories.

Since her information comes directly from Zelazny, what Lindsfold tells us is certainly not only accurate but insightful. What was in a writer's mind when he, or she, wrote a story is primary information, for the critic can then judge how well the writer has accomplished the task that he has set for himself.

Having information directly from the author himself, however, does not guarantee that a critic can make a complete assessment of a work. In addition to determining whether or not the author has accomplished the task he has set for himself, the critic must also

ask three other questions. First, is the writer's purpose worthwhile and well-conceived? Second, is the implementation of the purpose new, different, or effective? And third, is it possible that the writer has accomplished purposes, or explored themes, that even he did not conceive when he wrote the story?

The answer to the last question is, of course. Writers often do not understand the full implications of their themes. There's nothing wrong with that. It's common to many professions. Teachers, for example, hardly ever understand the full implications (positive or negative) of their teaching. As a case in point, Robert Frost published a poem in 1923 entitled "Fire and Ice." His first line reads, "Some say the world will end in fire." When asked to interpret the poem, most of my students think that Frost is warning them against nuclear holocaust. They fail to recognize that nuclear war was not in the public consciousness in 1923.[†] And while many myths refer to the destruction of the world by fire (Hopi myth holds that the god Sotuknang destroyed the world three times, the first by fire, before he was happy with

the Hopi people), it is unlikely that Frost was referring to any of them. Even if he knew various of these myths, the people for whom he was writing the poem would not. So, the logical interpretation of the line is that Frost was referring to Revelations, where the Christian God promises that he will destroy the world next time by fire. Few of my students recognize this, by the way. Does that mean that interpreting the first line as nuclear fire is wrong? I personally don't think so. What it means, rather, is that once a poem is written, it achieves a life of its own, and the meaning of the poem may well evolve as the culture and society in which it exists evolves. Meaning in art is certainly defined to some degree by places, and other cultures. If that were not the case, then none of us could read the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, the stories of the Borges, the novels of Kawabata, and so on with any sense of meaning.

If the work of art touches that wellspring of humanity—our values, emotions, and attitudes that all of us share, then it will yield again and again to different approaches, different times, and different cultures. All great literature will do this. And, without

doubt, some of Zelazny's stories reach this level.

It is here that Lindsfold's book becomes misleading. She seems to assume that interpretations of Zelazny's work which do not agree either with what she sees there, or what he has told her, are wrong. I do not mean to imply that she consciously or willfully misdirects us. Rather, she has failed, as all critics must, to provide all possible information and to recognize that there could be other legitimate interpretations of a particular story.

Because of my own relationship with Zelazny (I've known him for nearly half a century), I know that there are influences on Zelazny's work that are not referenced in Lindsfold's book. For example, in much of Zelazny's early work, dance played an important part. Dance is, of course, a manifestation of form. It is obviously an important element of "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," where form has become so rigid that the Martians are doomed to die because of it. And, those who walk the Pattern of Amber are engaging in a kind of dance, one so important that it is excluded to most and can be death to those who do not

walk it correctly. While Lindsfold discusses the musical arts, mentioning the impact of folk music and jazz on Zelazny's fiction, there is not a single word about dance and its relationship to form. Nor is there mention of the Bible, Carl Jung, Northrop Frye, or Rainer Maria Rilke, all considerably influential, at one time or another, on Zelazny's development and all represented strongly in his work. There are other influences which have been ignored. Lindsfold does mislead (I'm sure innocently) by omission.

The section of her book defending Zelazny's heroes, while compassionate, is uninformed. There is no sense in her discussion that while the hero must be a protagonist, the protagonist does not have to be a hero. Almost all critics now recognize the term hero to refer to Joseph Campbell's monomyth—separation, initiation, and return—and at that archetypal level, all heroes do indeed seem to be the same. Certainly critics like Brian Aldis, Joe Sanders, and Joe Francavilla would recognize Campbell's use of the term. Lindsfold neither mentions Campbell or the monomyth, nor makes a real distinction between hero and

protagonist. In other words, she omits the most basic element in any discussion of hero.

Lindskold rather passionately argues that Zelazny's heroes always change by the end of the story, and this is true. But she does not mention anywhere in her book that I published a 12,000 word monograph in 1979 (entitled *Roger Zelazny and Andre Norton: Proponents of Individualism*) comparing Zelazny's protagonists to those of Andre Norton's, which has as its thesis that "an individual can master himself and thereby advance to a higher level of consciousness" and that the protagonist "is subject to weaknesses of all kinds; he is buffeted by society, alienated, often unwise, and frequently disappointed by those around him. But he has one great capacity—a capacity to grow... and this is his one great hope." Joe Sanders has called this potential for psychological growth "Zelazny's great theme." I furthered this thesis in another article, "Roger Zelazny's Bold New Mythologies" [not my title] in Ungar Press's *Critical Encounters II: Writers and Themes in Science Fiction* (1982).

Such misreading also

occurs in the section of her book addressing Zelazny's females. Lindskold rather cavalierly attacks my interpretation of Jean Luharich in "Doors of His Face, Lamps of his Mouth." She objects primarily to my applying Jungian psychology to the character, though I recall that Zelazny was very heavily into Jung about the time he wrote this story. In particular, Lindskold objects to my statement that Jean was unconscious of her role as guide. In Jungian terms, Jean is that anima (the female side of the male personality), and animas are both guides to maturity and unconscious of that fact according to Jung himself. To be conscious of her actions implies that Jean would intentionally place herself in danger by swimming into the blades of the propeller under the great raft Tensquare just so that Carl could rescue her. Carl is an unknown quantity to her, a man who has failed again and again because of his paralyzing fear. This does not ring true to me. Does it seem logical that any person would consciously risk her, or his, life on such a long shot? Lindskold argues that the character of Jean should be interpreted as it is written, and as it is written, Jean is a

mirror-image of Carl in most, if not all, ways. She is his double, the female side, his anima. I would argue that I did interpret her as she was written.

My last caveat regarding Lindskold's book again concerns omission. She has chosen to focus her commentary on stories about which she, apparently, has gathered information from Zelazny, and not necessarily on their value as literature. She spends far more time on *Roadmarks* and *Bridge of Ashes* than they deserve. While both are interesting in some ways, both nonetheless fail. On the other hand, Lindskold barely mentions such superb stories as "The Engine at Heartspring's Center," the *My name is Legion* stories, "For a Breath I Tarry," and *Doorways in the Sand*. Do not misunderstand, there is passing mention of certain aspects of these stories. The *My Name is Legion* stories are referred to in the context of the protagonists' literary indebtedness to a John Collier character, and so on. But there is no sense in Lindskold's book of what is truly great, what is mediocre, and what is simply not worth discussing.

One of Zelazny's great achievements is to make us

conscious of our humanity, and none of his work does this better than "For a Breath I Tarry." Great literature must do this, and "Breath" does it beautifully. It has the delicate touch, the poetic imagery, the compassion, the revelation about our humanity, that distinguishes Zelazny's best efforts.

While I have taken Lindskold's book to task, it is nonetheless a valuable tool for anyone who is seriously interested in Zelazny's writing. My objections to the book are not so much what it says as what it fails to say. It seems to me that the basis for its oversights lie in its character—it seems much more of an appreciation than an appraisal.

—Carl B. Yoke

† While the idea of a super bomb was certainly imagined before the discovery of atomic energy, there was no practical basis for such a bomb until Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassman, two Germans, discovered fission from uranium in 1939.

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